

No Place to Call Home

By Mae Shurow

I don't fit. Is there anybody else out there who feels the same way? Every time I talk to the Father about this, He tells me, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

It took me a while to understand what this passage is saying. Jesus, in addressing a man who said to him "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," reveals what following Him will entail--those who choose to follow Him will have no place to call home! Jesus is telling this man there will be no longer be *any* place where he can feel at home; no place where he can lay his head; no place that he can rest; no place where he will feel accepted in this world. *This* is the cost of following Christ!



I don't fit anywhere. Is there anybody else out there who feels the same way? I certainly don't fit in the world any more, but what has been hardest for me is the fact that I don't fit in any of the established churches. I don't fit under the Evangelical umbrella because they have embraced a gospel of easy believism that leaves the conviction of the Holy Spirit out of the redemption process. I can't live

in the Reformed camp because I believe their teaching of unconditional election is void of the faith response God requires from those who will enter into covenant with Him. I cannot settle down with Catholic, Church of Christ, or Methodist because I believe baptismal regeneration is foreign to Scripture. Neither am I comfortable in the groups that are moving away from established denominations, such as the emergent movement or simple church groups--they are much too liberal for taste buds that have grown accustomed to feeding on the meat of the word. Sadly, I have no where to lay my head.

Well-meaning people continue to inform me of the need for a church home. While indeed, I *do* long for a place where I can feel at home, the question remains--did Jesus promise us a "church home"? Did He promise us a cozy community where we would be

accepted and loved, where "everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came" (Cheers song)? Or did Jesus tell us the path was narrow and there would be few that would find it; that those on that narrow path would be persecuted, reviled, spat upon, and despised? Folks, I realize this is a radical idea, but Christ did not promise and Scripture does not teach the concept of a church home. Rather, Jesus told us plainly that we would have *no place to call home*.

While it is true that the early Christians were together and had all things in common, Acts 8:3-4 tells us the followers of Christ were shortly scattered to the four winds because of persecution, preaching the word everywhere they went. Just as Abraham sojourned, or lived as a foreigner, in the land of promise as in a strange country (Hebrews 11:9), these early Christians joined those who had gone before them in becoming strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Hebrews 11:13).

Pilgrim means "a stranger, a sojourner, not one who is simply passing through, but a foreigner who has settled down, however briefly, next to or among the native people" (Zodhiates, 2000, #3927). It is as if we who follow Christ live in a foreign country, not knowing the language or the customs. Even though we manage to exist, we always feel like the "odd-man out." No matter how long we live in this strange land, we are always going to feel out of place among the natives and our hearts will never cease to yearn for home. So it is with our sojourn here on earth; those of us who follow Christ are resident aliens who never cease longing for our own country; a heavenly country (Hebrews 11:16) where we will truly fit.

In my case, feeling very out of place led to an unhealthy longing for an earthly place to call home. The Lord used Hebrews 13 to reveal the covetous condition of my heart:

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (Hebrews 13:5)

Most people think of this verse as addressing the lust for money or things, and it is true that we should not lust after such. But my desire was a lust for "fellowship," and the verse instructed me to be content with what I have. What do I have? Wonder of wonders, this verse tells me "He hath said, I will never leave thee or forsake thee."

Hebrews 13:13 goes on to say, "Let us go forth without the camp, bearing his reproach." In the Old Testament, sinners were put "without the camp." They were put

out from the community, reviled, and considered untouchable. Jesus was treated this way as well, and was crucified outside the camp just as the unclean were stoned outside of the city. As His followers, we bear His reproach:

Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a * stranger unto my brethren, and an **alien unto my mother's children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. (Psalm 69:7-9)

*Stranger means "be a stranger, i.e., not be in the main cultural group in an area, and so be estranged from society" (Swanson, LN. 11.55-11.89, 1997).

**Alien means "foreign, alien, i.e., pertaining to that which is not in the same clan, land area or religion as the speaker and so not in close association or limited association" (Swanson, LN. 34.40-34.41, 1997).

We, His followers, bear his reproach without the camp, estranged from the community. Even Paul was reviled, persecuted, and had "no certain dwelling place" (1 Corinthians 4:11-12). He was forsaken by all; only the Lord stood with him (2 Timothy 4:16-17). Do we think things will be any different for us? Hebrews tells us unmistakably, "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Here we have no continuing city--we have no permanent dwelling place, we have no place to call home, but we seek one to come. We do not despair because we seek a continuing city to come; a permanent dwelling, a secure city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10)! Our journey does not take us to that mount that might be touched, but "unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven..." (Hebrews 12:22-23).

The Body of Christ Scattered Throughout the World

How does this concept of no place to call home agree with the picture the New Testament gives us of a united Body of Christ? The Body of Christ does not have a physical unity, but rather fellowship with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 John 1:3) and a unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). Though we are few, we are part of this One Body wherever in this world we may be scattered. But since we are few, chances are slim that we will find other members of the Body near our earthly dwelling places, making this world a lonely place for the Remnant.

Jesus taught a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in which He used the wheat and the tares to illustrate this principle for us. Many people believe this parable teaches there will always be tares in the church until the end. But there are no tares in Christ's true church, and the parable does not say the field is the church; rather it says the field is the world (Matthew 13:38). The parable teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven grows in the midst of the world system. The Son of man sowed the good seed; the devil sowed the seed of the tares, and they grow together in the world. At the end, the tares will be gathered and burned, but the wheat will be gathered and put into the barn (Matthew 13:30). The point of the parable is not that there are tares in Christ's church, but that His church grows as wheat among a world full of tares!

Jesus prayed for us in John 17 because of this very situation. He said that we are not of the world, even as He is not of the world (v.14-16). But as Jesus was sent into the world, even so has *He sent hus into the world* (v.18). The world hates us because we are united to Christ (v. 14), but we are sent into the world to live as resident aliens so that the world may see the difference and believe (John 17:21).

Jesus continued in Matthew with another parable about the Kingdom of Heaven:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. (Matthew 13:47-49)

We will not be gathered together in our own city, New Jerusalem, until Christ returns. At that time, "he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds. . ." (Matthew 24:31, Mark 13:27). Until that great gathering, we will continue to be strangers and foreigners in the world, with no earthly place to call home.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:10)

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

